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SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS SITREP 3: SMOOTH OPERATIONS

REF: A. KINSHASA 1210

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1209

[1](#)1. By late afternoon, most areas of the country have reported large but orderly numbers of voters, competent poll workers, and helpful police. Report after report has described patient lines of Congolese voters, some dressed in their Sunday best, but devoting this particular Sunday to participation in their history. Abbe Apollinaire Malu Malu, president of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), reported at 14:00 local time that the elections were proceeding very smoothly, despite occasional and inevitable glitches. Post has communicated with other diplomatic missions as well as with international observer groups -- such as the Carter Center, COMESA, the EU, SADC-PF, and EISA -- and the consensus seems to be that this stage, the democratic process is so far going well.

[1](#)2. Some problems are inevitable, but at this time none of them appear overwhelming. Several Mission observers report that electricity (always iffy) is not available in some voting centers, leaving voters groping to mark their ballots in dark interior rooms. In these cases, some voters are taking their ballots outside of the voting booths, then returning to the dark with their finger placed firmly over the candidate's name and photo. Others report that the booths have been turned around to take advantage of natural light from windows, leaving the entire process open to the observers. No observers reported any intimidation; rather, it seems like the resilient Congolese are simply adapting to the inevitable, and sacrificing secrecy for accuracy.

[1](#)3. In a Kinshasa-based phenomenon, other observers have reported an unexpected response to the problem of managing a 6-page ballot and a limited number of ballot boxes (urns). In some voting sites, the harried CEI workers are simply telling voters to submit only the single page with the voter's preferred candidate to make the process of folding and depositing the ballot into the urn a little more efficient. Additionally, many observers noticed that the urns were already reaching capacity before noon, with little prospect of voting centers receiving additional urns. In some cases, the CEI workers used supplemental presidential urns (orange) to replace the full National Assembly urns (white). In at least one other case, the president of the voting center offered to empty the full urn (in full view of all relevant witnesses) into plastic bags, seal the bags, and put a new seal on the emptied urn for further use. Subsequent reports of MONUC transport delivering additional urns to some voting centers hopefully rendered such actions unnecessary. In all of these cases, the CEI will have to make an executive decision about how to handle such discrepancies, and whether or not the votes will be

considered valid.

¶4. One of the most problematic reports concerns the conduct of some of the Congolese observer groups. In addition to international observers, there are national observers as well as political party witnesses at each voting center and polling station. In most cases, the observers have simply watched the proceedings without attempting to interfere. In others, however, the witnesses have been more activist, giving advice, telling voters where to go and what to do, and folding ballot papers for voters. One observer reported two or three witnesses shoving into the voting booth (and thus out of public view) with a succession of elderly voters -- some of whom clearly needed assistance, some less obviously needing their help.

¶5. The last issue which arose concerned reports of registered voters selling their ID cards, and of other surprised voters (without ink on their fingers) being turned away after CEI officials advised them that, since their name was already crossed off the voters' list, they had apparently already voted. In one case, an observer reported watching a voter who appeared to be about 15 years old placing his ballot in the urn; when the observer asked to see the voter ID card, the photo did not match the voter. Such reports are rare, but troubling.

¶6. Despite these problems, however, the vote has so far gone surprisingly well. Nationwide turnout appears very high in the East -- in the Kivus, Ituri, and Katanga province. As of 15:00 local time, many polling sites had very short lines, indicating that most people voted early. Many observers reported that in the voting centers that they visited, turnout by noon had already reached 50%, if not higher. As

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Malu Malu noted today, given that there are over 49,000 polling stations, exceptions and problems at a few are not nearly as remarkable as the smooth operations at the majority.

¶7. The voting centers are scheduled to close at 17:00 local time, although anybody still in line at that time will be allowed to vote. The preliminary count will begin when the final voting has ended. Mission observers, along with other international observers, will remain at some stations and will witness the preliminary count.  
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